

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A method of controlling distribution of electronic information comprising the steps of:

5 retrieving, at a user location, a segment of encrypted electronic information;

receiving, from a key server, (a) a copy of a decryption key for the segment, and (b) at least one user limitation assigned to the segment and associated with the decryption key;

10 accessing the segment using the copy of the decryption key at the user location for the segment and a control process, the control process responsive to a user limitation to control distribution of the electronic information; and

15 destroying the copy of the decryption key at the user location after accessing the segment.

2. The method of controlling distribution of electronic information of claim 1, wherein access to the decryption key is controlled by the key server subject to a unique segment identification associated with the segment and the user limitation associated with the segment.

25 3. A method of accessing first and second encrypted segments of an electronic document comprising the steps of:

retrieving, at the user location, a first encrypted segment of the electronic document;

30 receiving, from a key server, (a) a copy of a first decryption key for the first segment and (b) at least one user limitation assigned to the first

segment and associated with the first decryption key;

accessing the first segment using the copy of the first decryption key for the first segment; and  
at the user location, destroying the copy of the first decryption key for the first segment as a precondition to receiving a decryption key for accessing a second segment of the electronic document.